

The Israel Lobby

The cover of *The Economist* from May 26, 2007 was a black and white photo of three glassy-eyed, awe-filled Israeli soldiers looking up, forty years ago, to the Western, or Wailing, Wall, having just captured East Jerusalem from Jordan. We read, in bold face, "Israel's wasted victory, the six-day war, 40 years on."¹ Was the war a waste? Was capturing the West Bank and Gaza and Golan Heights and occupying them for 40 years, against all principles of international law a waste? Was seizing Arab land and settling hundreds of thousands of people on it, many of them American immigrants, and creating oppressive conditions for the Palestinians who lived there a waste? You can see where I'm going with this.

It's not only the 40th anniversary of the Six-Day War but it's also the 30th anniversary of the International Psychohistorical Association this year. I am delighted to say that the spirit of free inquiry and concern for finding important and useful truths that will serve our common humanity that has animated the IPA for 30 years is alive and well. In fact, on the particular matter of how so many, Israeli and American Jews and otherwise, have gotten so much wrong and so badly, I am a Johnny Come Lately. In the fall of 1978, *The Journal of Psychohistory* devoted its entire issue to "Judaism as a Group-Fantasy."² Some of what I will offer here is drawn from that brave and controversial issue.

I've written for the *Journal* on some of the underlying psychology of authoritarianism and political violence as evidenced in Arab culture³ and in the American religious right.⁴ I will have more to say here about the role of the Christian Religious Right in the Israel Lobby.

So, what's the problem? First, a quick look at the history of the Zionist settlements in Palestine, then a look at things from the time of the estab-

lishment of Israel until 1967, and since then in the Occupied Territories, and then a look at the most recent flare up over The Israel Lobby.

Avner Falk, the Israeli psychoanalyst and historian, in his *Fratricide in the Holy Land—A Psychoanalytic View of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*,⁵ notes two problems from the outset of Jewish settlement in the 19th century: (a) the "Zionists' denial of the existence of the Arabs in Palestine and of the Arab hostility to Zionism, and (b) the Jewish lack of empathy for Arab feelings, the Zionists' inability to comprehend the feelings of the Arabs..."⁶ There was considerable bad blood from both sides right up to the time of the birth of Israel and then an explosion of violence that included six major massacres of Arabs by Jews, and 18 lesser ones, in the period between 1947 and 1949. Deir Yassin is the most famous of these. Benny Morris, the respected Israeli "New Historian," and others, have documented these, and Morris in his *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*,⁷ put to rest the myth that Arabs left voluntarily or under the direction of Arab commanders. The war produced around 700,000 Arab refugees. (From 750,000 to 900,000 Jews were compelled or forced by deteriorating conditions of life to leave Arab countries around this time, with some 600,000 assimilating, with varying degrees of success, into Israel.)

From 1949 to 1967, the Israelis lived in a low-grade state of siege, punctuated by the ill-advised British-French-Israeli incursion into Suez in 1956 to seize the canal. International pressure, very much including that from President Eisenhower, forced the expeditionary force to withdraw. Prior to that, Arab *fedayeen* had over the course of several years killed close to 125 Israeli civilians in numerous separate raids. A commando unit led by Major Ariel Sharon raided the Arab village of Kibieh in October of 1953, killing 69 civilians. Sharon led other raids, on military targets. Another civilian massacre, at Kfar Kassem, occurred on the eve of the 1956 war and 49 Arabs were killed.

Then in 1967, full-scale war broke out. Israel destroyed the Egyptian air force on the ground, seized the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. Although there were overtures by the Israelis soon after the war of a "land for peace" deal, the Arabs rejected these. The Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories commenced. The Yom Kippur War (or Ramadan War or October War) in 1973 further humiliated the Arab states who, enjoying early victories, wound up being soundly trounced by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). In September of 1978, building on the offer to trade "land for peace" by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, President Jimmy Carter brokered a deal between Israel and Egypt. The Sinai was returned to the Egyptians and the two countries have been

at peace since. A peace treaty was signed by Lebanon and Israel in May of 1983, and by Jordan and Israel in October of 1994. The Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization were signed in September 1993.

It is 14 years since the Oslo Accords and, of course, there have been many developments, including the Annapolis Conference held at the end of November of 2007. For the sake of brevity, I have included here only the most relevant history for this paper, and, again, a very brief sketch of that. I have no intention of airbrushing either Arab aggression and fecklessness out of the picture nor of minimizing the hate rhetoric and violent actions against Israel and its citizens. This paper, however, focuses on the depredations of the Israelis and, more specifically, the enabling behavior of American Jews and other members of the Israel Lobby.

However, whatever good intentions Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin may have had in signing the Oslo Accords, which was to lead to the enactment of a permanent resolution leading to two states, with a withdrawal by Israel from the Occupied Territories on the West Bank and in Gaza (with a resolution of the Syrian territory in the Golan Heights a separate issue), the establishment of the Jewish settlements was by then an enormous problem, both for the Arabs and for the Israeli Labor government. In 1993 at the time of the Oslo Accords, there were 112,000 settlers in the West Bank (not including East Jerusalem), 5,000 in the Gaza Strip, and 130,00 in East Jerusalem. By 2004, there were 268,000 in the West Bank, 8,000 in Gaza (although all of these were soon to leave), and 200,000 in East Jerusalem. Had Yitzhak Rabin not been assassinated by a right-wing Jew in November of 1995, the settlements might not have proliferated as they have. They are now the "facts on the ground" that the right-wing parties and the Israeli settlement movement had always hoped they would be.

The Arab land taken by Israel after the Arabs left in the period between 1947 and 1949 and the land seized in the West Bank and Gaza for the Jewish settlements are an understandably sore point. The Israelis have consistently denied or obscured the confiscation of this land, but a report from November of 2006 by the Israeli activist group, Peace Now, purports "that the settlement enterprise has, since its inception, ignored Israeli law and undermined not only the collective property rights of the Palestinians as a people, but also the private property rights of individual Palestinian landowners."⁸ The veteran reporter and editor, Joseph Lelyveld, in writing in March 2007 about Jimmy Carter's book, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*,⁹ said "...it's precisely in their systematic and stealthy grabbing of

Arab land that the Israeli authorities and settlers most closely emulate the South African ancien régime."¹⁰

Let us return to the psychological dimension. Avner Falk notes:

...the human tendency toward dualistic thinking, which, as we shall see, is the result of the unconscious defensive process of splitting. This process does not operate alone: it is accompanied by unconscious projection and externalization, the hallmark of the paranoid attitude. An Israeli Jewish psychologist thought that we Israëlis are a paranoid nation because we see ourselves as the victims of this world, with the whole world as our enemies. We live in constant fear of annihilation and as a group have no empathy for the suffering of our antagonists.¹¹

Falk quotes from Ofer Grosbard's *Israel on the Couch: The Psychology of the Peace Process*,¹² in reference to the Israelis' view of the Palestinians: "...our arrogant stance toward them comes, like any arrogance, from the emotional hurt we feel, that we are trying to project."¹³ I would add that it is still difficult for many Jews, and most others as well, to see how the Nazi regime was the result of a distillation of the brutal child-rearing practices visited upon generations of helpless German and Austrian children.

To return to the situation in the Occupied Territories, the system of checkpoints and bureaucratic obstacles that have been thrown up over the years by the Israeli government have increasingly constrained the ability of the Palestinians to pursue business. Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Desmond Tutu, writing in *The Guardian* in December of 2006, said: "I've been very deeply distressed in my visit to the Holy Land; it reminded me so much of what happened to us black people in South Africa. I have seen the humiliation of the Palestinians at checkpoints and roadblocks, suffering like us when young white police officers prevented us from moving about."¹⁴ On two occasions, the Israeli government has been instructed by the Supreme Court of Israel to alter the route of the barrier to ensure that negative impacts on Palestinians would be minimized and proportional. In 2004, the United Nations passed a number of resolutions and the International Court of Justice, following hearings in which Israel did not participate, issued a non-binding "advisory opinion" calling for the barrier to be removed and the Arab residents to be compensated for any damage done.

Sara Roy, a senior research scholar at Harvard's Center for Middle Eastern Studies, wrote an eloquent essay titled "How Can Children of the Holocaust Do Such Things? A Jewish Plea." (The essay appears in *The War on Lebanon: A Reader*¹⁵ but you can find it online at "CounterPunch."¹⁶) Israel's 34-day bombing campaign against Lebanon and Hezbollah positions there in the summer of 2006 cost a thousand civilians lives and de-

stroyed billions of dollars of infrastructure. It was the proximate cause of the civil war that ensued. After the crimes by Israelis during the intifadas and in Lebanon, Roy had had enough. She is not a psychohistorian, but she is zeroed in on the underlying psychology that perpetuates so much of the suffering. She quotes prominent Israeli and American sources in the section called "A new discourse of the unconscious"—Roy writes: "We speak without mercy, numb to the pain of others, incapable of being reached-unconscious." and quotes:

The senior political and military analyst for the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*, "the most important aspect of this war: Hezbollah and what this terrorist organization symbolizes must be destroyed at any price..."

"We must reduce to dust the villages of the south..." stated Haim Ramon, long known as a political dove and Israel's Minister of Justice.

Eli Yishai, Israel's Deputy Prime Minister, proposed turning south Lebanon into a "sandbox."

A Channel 1 military correspondent, suggested an exhibition of Hezbollah corpses followed by a parade of prisoners in their underwear in order "to strengthen the home front's morale."

"But speaking from our own Judaic faith and legal legacy," argued the Rabbinical Council of America, "we believe that Judaism would neither require nor permit a Jewish soldier to sacrifice himself in order to save deliberately endangered enemy civilians."

So we come to the question Roy asks: how can people who should know better do such things? Consistently, over many years, sometimes mercilessly, usually brutally.

Why is it so difficult, even impossible to incorporate Palestinians and other Arab peoples into the Jewish understanding of history? Why is there so little perceived need to question our own narrative (for want of a better word) and the one we have given others, preferring instead to cherish beliefs and sentiments that remain impenetrable? Why is it virtually mandatory among Jewish intellectuals to oppose racism, repression and injustice almost anywhere in the world and unacceptable—indeed, for some, an act of heresy—to oppose it when Israel is the oppressor, choosing concealment over exposure?¹⁷

As far as Americans go, and most American Jews at that, it turns out, the Israel Lobby flies just below the radar. As far as Congress and any Presidential administration go, they decidedly do not.

Two highly respected and well-placed American academics, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, wrote in March of 2006: "The U.S. national interest should be the primary object of American foreign policy.

For the past several decades, however, and especially since the Six Day War in 1967, the centerpiece of U.S. Middle East policy has been its relationship with Israel." They further wrote: "...the overall thrust of U.S. policy in the region is due almost entirely to U.S. domestic politics, and especially to the activities of the 'Israel Lobby.'" ¹⁸ (Mearsheimer and Walt subsequently published a book-length version of their essay.) ¹⁹ That, if you were on vacation in 2006 outside the solar system, set off "The Storm over the Israel Lobby," as Michael Massing termed it in June of 2006 in *The New York Review of Books*. ²⁰ (Not incidentally, if you have time to read just one paper on all of this, read Massing's piece.) Mearsheimer and Walt's paper, received much attention, most of it negative, but not all. That storm raged for a few months, and then subsided for a while, then Jimmy Carter published *Palestine Peace Not Apartheid* late in 2006, and the hurricane revived. President Carter, the man credited by both Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat with forging the Israeli-Egyptian peace, was called an anti-Semite and other unfortunate things.

What is the Israel Lobby? For one thing, it is not the "Jewish Lobby." In a letter responding to a review of their book in the "NY Times" by Leslie Gelb, Mearsheimer and Walt say:

Gelb refers repeatedly to a "Jewish lobby," despite the fact that we never employ the term in our book. Indeed, we explicitly rejected this label as inaccurate and misleading, both because the lobby includes non-Jews like the Christian Zionists and because many Jewish Americans do not support the hard-line policies favored by its most powerful elements. The Israel lobby, we emphasized, is defined by its "specific political agenda ... not the religious or ethnic identity of those pushing it." By using the phrase "Jewish lobby" in the headline of the review, in the text and in a pull-quote, Gelb and the editors of the "Book Review" misrepresented a key part of our argument. ²¹

The Israel Lobby is identified with a few principal groups in the United States: The American Israel Public Affairs Committee's (AIPAC) is the most prominent and influential, but the Anti-Defamation League and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations are the two other major Jewish organizations in the Israel Lobby. But, it is essential to understand, the Israel Lobby is also comprised of two other critical wings: the "Christian Zionists" of the American Religious Right and the neoconservatives, Jewish and Gentile, who have influenced national security so thoroughly over the years, primarily during the time of the Reagan and second Bush administrations.

For reasons that if I were a clinician I might characterize as "pathological," the Christian Zionists support the Israeli government and the set-

tlement movement primarily because they are seeking the apocalyptic "end times" and the prophecies, we are told, predict Armageddon to begin in the Middle East. So, strife between Israel and the Arabs is, essentially, a necessary component for the end of time and the advent of the Second Coming. Hallelujah. (Or something.) Please see the work of distinguished psychohistorians such as our Distinguished Academic Lecturer of a couple of years ago, Charles Strozier, on this aspect of American Christian fundamentalist thinking. I once heard the distinguished Israeli academic, Avishai Margalit, speak of the very troublesome nature of the participation of the "Christian Zionists" in the debate. In any event, this arm of the Israel Lobby has had huge sway, particularly since the "Republican Revolution" led by Newt Gingrich in 1994. Tom Delay and Dick Armey were prominent and outspoken in defense of the Israelis at the expense of the Palestinians.

Meanwhile, prominent neoconservatives including Jews such as Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, Richard Pipes and Bill Kristol, and Gentiles such as Jeanne Kirkpatrick, incoming World Bank President Robert Zoellick, John Bolton, Richard Armitage, and Donald Rumsfeld, and Muslim Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, have been vocal not only about the primacy of Israel in the region, but also about pursuing a militarily aggressive agenda that includes action against Syria and Iran. The Project for the New American Century (PNAC) is an initiative begun in 1997 by Kristol that has strongly advocated military force and particularly the promotion of the second Iraq War and its members and supporters have included a witch's brew of neoconservatives.

So, isn't the Israel Lobby doing what other powerful lobbies do? Seeking to find traction and influence Congress and the executive, and the courts for that matter, to pursue their agenda or at least not pursue policies antithetical to their agenda? Sure. But what Mearsheimer and Walt, Jimmy Carter, George Soros, Michael Massing, Tony Judt, Nicholas Kristoff, Sara Roy and Philip Weiss, and, much more importantly, a growing number of activist left-wing American Jews, contend is that the Israel Lobby has bribed and cheated, bullied and browbeaten elected officials and the media into unqualified support for policies that are not only counterproductive to the best interests of the United States, but to those of Israel and, by extension, Jews everywhere.

It is not important here to go into all the indictments regarding the Israel Lobby's behavior and the submissive attitude of the American political establishment. Let me just cite, as an indication, the testimony of one Congressional staffer cited by Massing in his magisterial *New York Review* ar-

ticle from last June, in regard to contributions funneled by AIPAC, "We can count on well over half the House—250 to 300 members—to do reflexively whatever AIPAC wants." With this context in mind, one should recall that in the summer of 2006 the U.S. House of Representatives approved a resolution in support of Israel's hysterical (and badly executed) military response to the kidnapping of an IDF soldier by Hezbollah—which of course escalated into a full-blown offensive by Hezbollah and the taking of over a thousand civilian lives in Lebanon by the IDF. The vote? 410 to 8.

Let's now return to Sara Roy's poignant question: "How Can Children of the Holocaust Do Such Things?" I rely here on the work of three brilliant psychohistorians: Howard F. Stein, in his article for the "Journal of Psychohistory" from the fall of 1978, "Judaism and the Group-Fantasy of Martyrdom: The Psychodynamic Paradox of Survival Through Persecution," Jay Y. Gonen in his book *The Psychohistory of Zionism*, and Avner Falk in his *Fratricide in the Holy Land—A Psychoanalytic View of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*.

Stein notes that Jewish "defense" leagues of many varieties "keep perpetual vigil for signs of anti-Semitism. A slight tremor presages the inevitable major quake."²² In James Traub's profile of ADL leader Abe Foxman from January of 2007, we get an up close and personal glimpse of this hypervigilance. Traub writes: "Foxman escaped the worst of the Holocaust, but it has deeply shaped his sense of the world and is presumably responsible for his feeling that nothing short of supreme and unflinching vigilance will ward off the next cataclysm."²³ Traub notes further, a Pew Global Attitudes Poll in 2004 finding that anti-Semitism had declined in much of the West and was lowest in the U.S., yet Foxman, we learn, "... makes the stupefyingly counterintuitive claim that high rates of Jewish assimilation are a reaction to discriminatory treatment, rather than a proof of the opposite."²⁴

But the Jewish experience during World War II is not enough, Stein believes, to explain the hypervigilance.

The proverbial Jewish sigh "*Oi vay*" (woe is me), the eternal lament, the abundance of *yessurim* (worries) and *tsorres* (troubles), together prepare the child for a life based on pessimism, inward-turned aggression, free-floating anxiety, and self-doubt.²⁵

Wait, it gets worse:

Within Jewry, dangerous affect was desexualized and depersonalized, and phobically split-off from within the Jewish personal and cultural midst. Forbidden and forbidding pagan impulses associated with the mother, and the equally taboo and feared oedipal impulses associated with the father, were dissociated upon the Gentiles, who came to embody all that could not be integrated within the Jewish psyche.²⁶

Stein's paper, and indeed the whole issue of the *Journal of Psychohistory* from the fall of 1978, are too dense and eloquent for me to try to reproduce here. I can only give you a taste.

Stein cites Weston La Barre's work on culture and group-fantasy as providing the theoretical basis for his analysis. Stein quotes La Barre:

A society of individuals defends its unexaminable sacred culture because this sacred culture is in fact a compost of group defense mechanisms. Science seeks feedback of experience; the neurotic and the religionist desperately avoid it, for earlier experience is the source of the trauma.²⁷

Or, as Stein puts it:

A clue to history lies not in reasons people offer to explain it, but in the fact that the greater part of a group's reasons constitute institutionalized rationalizations which together form a collective delusional system the purpose of which is to disguise rather than to reveal inner identity.²⁸

Jay Gonen tells us at the outset of his book: "Most of all, the Zionist movement was characterized by its focus on a rapid transition from inferiority to overcompensation."²⁹

Gonen tells us that in order to tell his story, he must alternate between the Bible and Freud. Thus, he says: "The biblical image of God is the collective projection by the Israelites of the image of the loving but jealous and vengeful father in their ancient culture."³⁰ He talks about the male dominance of the culture then posits: "There must have been a price to pay for instilling such long-lasting paternal dominance."³¹ Thus, perhaps the greatest problem of the aptly named "Abrahamic" traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam: patriarchalism that stunts the development of the individual, the family and the society. As noted earlier, I have written about the underlying psychology of Arab violence and American right-wing authoritarianism and I have found a pervasive misogyny and thus a self-hatred to be the recurring theme.

Regarding authoritarianism, Avner Falk notes the severely violent beatings that Ariel Sharon received at the hands of his father and the authoritarian personality Sharon developed. It's no wonder that the "regressed large group" as Vamik Volkan might call right-wing Israeli and American Jews, would gravitate to Sharon and his message of Israeli dominance and Palestinian subjugation.

Another unifying theme is the sense of victimization that these groups seem to experience. In a review of Charles Strozier's book *Apocalypse—On the Psychology of Fundamentalism in America*, I noted his identification of "... their paranoia, their heated aggressiveness, their grandiosity, and their

deep sense of victimization."³² Arabs, of course, as Falk notes, "... see themselves as the victims of colonialism and imperialism, personified by the United States and Israel."³³

I also noted Strozier's finding "...that fundamentalists reject their 'broken, fragmented selves' to embrace their 'born-again' selves." Similarly, Gonen has a lot to say about the Hebrew concept of *hevlai*, literally "throes of birth," and how Zionism represented a rebirth for Jews. Gonen writes: "...mother Zion, after being made love to by her 'homecoming' sons, gave birth to new life. Thus, the children replaced their father, husbanded the mother, and fathered themselves."³⁴

Erik Erikson coined the term *pseudospeciation* that describes groups—"from tribes to nations, from castes to classes, from religions to ideologies"—as having "a firm sense of distinct and superior identity" and "that each group must invent for itself a place and a moment in the very center of the universe when and when an especially provident deity caused it to be created superior to all others, the mere mortals."³⁵ This leads, inevitably one might think, to a group narcissism which "is explained as an unconscious defense against the emotional hurts, losses, injuries, and blows that each group has suffered over its collective history, as well as a means to preserve a vital sense of separateness."³⁶ Falk reminds us that this group narcissism is in play in nationalism, patriotism, and chauvinism and "may result from an unconscious displacement of the personal narcissism of each of the individuals belonging to the group onto the national group, and of an identification with the group as a mirror image of one's own grandiose self."³⁷

Further, Falk treats denial and says "The Zionist denial of the reality of the Palestinian Arabs was a pathological defensive unconscious process, and we Israelis have paid a very tragic price for it—over 20,000 of our young men killed during the interminable Arab-Israeli wars, hundreds of innocent victims murdered by Palestinian Arab suicide bombers, hundreds of thousands of us wounded, maimed, crippled, widowed, orphaned, bereft of our children, and traumatized."³⁸ So, it is not just about injustice and violence against Arabs. It is very much about self-destructive behavior on the part of the Israelis and the organized American Jewish establishment that blindly enables it.

Let me return to the extraordinarily passionate and eloquent Sara Roy, speaking, largely, of American Jews:

We are remote from the conscious world—brilliantly ignorant, blindly visionary, unable to resist from within. We live in an unchanging place, absent of season and reflection, devoid of normality and growth, and most important of all, emptied—or so we aim—of the other. A ghetto still but now, unlike before, a ghetto of our own making.³⁹

And then she throws down the gauntlet:

There is enormous pressure—indeed coercion—within organized American Jewry to present an image of “wall to wall unity” as a local Jewish leader put it. But this unity is an illusion—at its edges a smoldering flame rapidly engulfing its core—for mainstream Jewry does not speak for me or for many other Jews.⁴⁰

Philip Weiss, writing in *The Nation*, asked whether an AIPAC alternative was on the horizon. The “Great Jewish Hope” that “... because Jewish public opinion is well to the left of mainstream Jewish organizations on such questions as the Iraq War and a two-state solution in Israel and Palestine, the misrepresentation has to end.” One activist he cites talks about a large “universe” of liberal, politically active Jews who haven’t really cared or thought much about Israel. “Their passivity has allowed right-wing Jews who care more about the issue to affect policy.” and “the challenge to an alternative lobby is figuring out how to capture ‘the moderate Jewish left’ on Israel issues.”⁴¹

There are activist groups gaining traction, groups like Americans for Peace Now and Jewish Voice for Peace, among others. There are also little burgeoning nonpartisan, nonethnic policy groups like the Council for the National Interest which “advocates a ‘common-sense’ U.S. policy of perfect even-handedness between Israel and Palestine.” Both JVP and CNI call for an end to Israeli occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and share other similar goals such as an end to violence against civilians by both sides.

It seems past time for us with a stake in the future of the Middle East to lift the scales from our eyes. Our common enemy is not just the pernicious reactionary behavior of political and religious fundamentalists, but the ignorance and apathy on our part that has allowed what should be a conflict amenable to resolution to spiral so badly out of control. We, Gentile or Jew, religious or secular, must support reasonable and just solutions. We can be bystanders no more.

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Jetzt in deutscher Sprache!

Lloyd deMause
Das emotionale Leben der Nationen

Aus dem Englischen von Christian Lackner
Klagenfurt 2005, Drava Verlag
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... Psychoanalyse im großen Stil: Nicht Individuen liegen auf der Couch des Therapeuten. Lloyd deMause, sondern ganze Nationen. Von seiner New Yorker Wohnung aus erforscht der Psychohistoriker seit vier Jahrzehnten die Stimmungsschwankungen und Gemütslagen der Gesellschaften ... (*3sat/Kulturzeit*)



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